

John Hossack House
LaSalle County
Ottawa, Illinois

HABS Ill. 141

HABS
ILL,
50-OTWA,
1-

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. Ill.1.

Historic American Buildings Survey
Earl H. Reed, District Officer
435 North Michigan Ave., Chicago

JOHN HOSSACK HOUSE

Ottawa, Illinois

Owner: Mr. and Mrs. Thomas R. Godfrey.

Date of Erection: 1854.

Architect: Sylvannus Grow.

Builder: Alonzo Edwards.

Present Condition: Good.

Number of Stories: Two.

Materials of Construction: Wood exteriors. Two wings have disappeared. Many changes to house.

Other Existing Records: Photographs.

Additional Data: (See following pages).

JOHN HOSSACK HOUSE
LASALLE COUNTY
OTTAWA, ILLINOIS

DISTRICT NO. ILL.1.
NORTHERN ILLINOIS

EARL H. REED
DISTRICT OFFICER

Project No. Ill. 141

Ralph F. Gross
H. Stewart Leonard

SOURCE

Recorder's
Office
LaSalle
County
Book, 37
p. 13

John Hossack bought the undivided half of Lot No. 1, and the whole of Lot No. 2, block 27, original town of Ottawa for \$250, on September 23, 1853. The house was built in 1854, or early in 1855, as the tax records show an evaluation of \$20 for 1854 and \$2500 for 1855.

"John
Hossack"
Ottawa,
1892

The contractor was Alonzo Edwards and the Architect was Sylvannus Grow, of Chicago about whom practically nothing is known. John Hossack was born in Elgin, Scotland in 1806. He migrated to Quebec and Ottawa where he farmed and worked on the Erie Canal. He then came to Illinois in the hope of working on the canal here. The sudden abandonment of this project caused him to turn to farming again. He then went into the grain forwarding business and in this field he made a great name and a large amount of money. The result of his affluence is to be seen in this house.

Fred
Hossack.

According to family tradition, he wanted to copy or recreate the spirit of an old southern house that he had seen. He communicated this desire to his architect, Sylvannus Grow, who prepared plans following Mr. Hossack's ideas. The cost of this design, however, was too great and Mr. Hossack proceeded to revise these plans. According to the best information available the present house was built from these revisions.

Originally it consisted of a large central structure flanked by wings on either side. Subsequent owners have made many changes. After the Hossacks, the J.E. Scotts lived in the house (Mrs. Scott was a Hossack), then the E.A. Reads, after whom the house was uninhabited

until 1925 when the Thomas R. Godfreys came into possession. The two wings have disappeared but have been restored in the drawings from old photographs in the possession of the Survey. The closets on the second floor were added, the rooms on the first floor were rearranged, a small room on the second floor was converted into a bath and the French doors on the north and south elevations on the first floor opening onto the porches were cut down and changed into windows. The present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas R. Godfrey, are trying to restore the house to its original condition.

The house presents many interesting features, the southern influence is obvious and that together with the amateurish accomplishments of John Hossack present a striking example of pioneer architecture. Mr. Hossack is apparently responsible for the porch arcade in which the soffit of the arch is narrower than the width of the columns.

The builder, John Hossack was an exceedingly interesting character. He not only was a force in the development of the grain trade in Ottawa and Chicago, but he was a staunch abolitionist and this house was a major station on the underground railroad. Mr. Hossack was instrumental in spiriting a captured negro from the custody of the United States marshall and as a result was arrested with nine other men and brought to trial in Chicago. His spirited plea in court brought him much sympathy in the following election, when he ran for governor on the abolitionist ticket.

By

Ralph T. Cross

Approved

Emerson